

# Fort Davis

National Historic Site


National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5

## Fort Davis and Uncle Sam's Camels



<h1 style="margin: 0;">Fort Davis</h1> <h2 style="margin: 0;">National Historic Site</h2>	<p><b>National Park Service</b> <b>U.S. Department of the Interior</b></p>	
<b>Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5</b>		<b>Teacher Notes: Fort Davis and Uncle Sam's Camels</b>

### Topic: What Is That Animal? Fort Davis and Uncle Sam's Camels

- Students will understand the factors that led to the establishment of Fort Davis along the Lower Road between San Antonio and El Paso.
- Students will become acquainted with the modes of travel in the 1850s and the hardships associated with traveling along frontier roads.
- Students will become familiar with the U.S. Army's camel experiment and the cause of its decline. As part of the Jefferson Davis experiment with camels as transport in the desert, camels came through Fort Davis three different times...1857, 1859, 1860.

Objectives and Standards: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/>

Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
113.4: 1,2,3,4,5,6, 7,8,13,18,19	113.5: 1,2,3,4,5,10, 11,13,16,17,18	113.6: 4,5,6,8,9, 21,22,23,24	113.7: 4,6,8,9,25, 26,27

#### Methods of Adapting Material to Various Grade Levels:

Teachers can adapt the reading level of the materials by reading the material to the class in the lower levels and having older students read individually or in pairs. These questions and activities can be used as a springboard for discussion and research. They do not necessarily have to be completed as paper/pencil task.

**Materials Needed:** Student reading: *What Is that Animal?*  
Student Activity Sheets

#### Lesson Activities:

Historic readings/background information/questions  
Journal Entry  
Who Can Carry the Most? Math activity  
Research and comparison activity on types of camels used

#### Internet Resources:

The following websites will offer additional information:

[www.over-land.com/](http://www.over-land.com/)  
[www.texasbeyondhistory.net](http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net)  
<http://www.lsjunction.com/facts/camels.htm>  
<http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/explore/animals/camel.html>

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/mammals/camel/Camelcoloring.shtml>

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/quc1.html>

<http://www.transchool.eustis.army.mil/Museum/ExhibitsIndex.htm>

**Reading resources:**

Teacher: *Uncle Sam's Camels*, the Journal of May H. Stacey, 1929 by Lewis B. Lesley (ed.)

Students: *Camels for Uncle Sam* by Diane Yancey

**Activity 1 What Is That Animal?**

- Students will read the student historical background article (2 pages) as a class, individually, or in pairs depending on reading level.
- Students will answer the questions on the “What Did You Learn” page.
- Students can research camels and learn more about the different types of camels using library or Internet resources. The two types of camel imported by the army Camel Corps in the 1850s were Arabian (also called Dromedary) and Bactrian camels. Students can compare the two kinds of camels using a Venn diagram (1 page) to show the differences and likenesses. The following web site provides an elementary level fact sheet and pictures that will help students research and compare the two species of camels.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/mammals/camel/camelcoloring.shtml>

**Activity 2 Create a Journal Entry (1 page)**

- Students will imagine themselves as soldiers and create a journal entry and picture describing the sight of camels arriving at Fort Davis.

**Activity 3 Who Can Carry the Most? (1 page)**

- Students will complete the “Who Can Carry the Most?” worksheet by calculating and comparing the loads carried by the two pack animals: a camel and a mule. They will draw items that would have been carried by the animals.

Wrap-up and Assessment: Students will successfully complete the student activity sheets and indicate understanding through discussion and other activities.

## What Did You Learn? **Answer Sheet**

Name the four animals that carried supplies for the army during the time of Fort Davis.

**Oxen, mules, horses and camels**

Why did Jefferson Davis think camels would be good for carrying supplies in the desert? Do you agree? Why or why not?

**The camels' natural environment was the desert and they had been used for transportation for centuries in Africa and the Middle East. Accept reasonable answers.**



Why were the camels called "Uncle Sam's Camels"? Who was Uncle Sam?

**The United States government is often referred to as Uncle Sam. The camel experiment was promoted by Jefferson Davis, the US Secretary of War.**

Why was the camel experiment ended?

**The Civil War began and US soldiers left the Southwest for the war in the East.**

Compare and contrast the use of trains and the use of camels as a way of transporting supplies for the army. Give your reasons.

**Accept reasonable answers**



Do you think you would like to ride a camel? Explain.

**Accept reasonable answers**

Extra Credit: Camels were sometimes called "ships of the desert." Can you find out why?

**The gait of the camel creates a "rolling" sensation similar to that of ocean travel. Also, they transport supplies across miles of wave-like sands. Accept reasonable answers.**

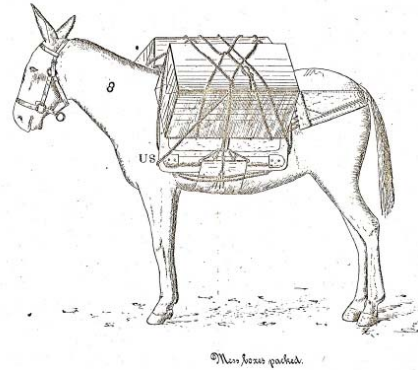
## My Journal **Answer Sheet**

Some soldiers at Fort Davis kept journals in which they wrote about the happenings of daily life there. Imagine that you were a soldier who saw these amazing animals arrive. Using what you know and what you have read, write a journal entry about the day the camels came to Fort Davis. Soldiers sometimes illustrated their diaries with pictures. Draw a picture of that day on the back of this paper.

Accept reasonable answers

## Teacher Answer Sheet

### Who Can Carry the Most?



#### Load the camel

4 Water Barrels @ 85 pounds each	$4 \times 85 = 340$
Bale of Hay @ 250 pounds each	250
Box of Camp Kettles @ 45 pounds	45
Food Boxes/Sacks @ 80 pounds	80
Tent Canvas @ 86 pounds	86
Total	801

#### Load the Pack Mule

1 water barrel @ 85 pounds	85
1 sack of oats @ 82 pounds	82
Food box @ 780 pounds	70
Total	237

Add up the supplies each animal can carry. Carry your answer with a calculator. Draw small pictures of the supplies in the blank space next to each animal.

There was one other way the army transported its supplies in the 1850s. It required several mules or horses to pull it. What was it?

**A wagon**

Draw a picture of it on the back of the paper.

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Student Activity: Fort Davis and Uncle Sam's Camels – Reading

### What Is That Animal?

Can you imagine? You are a soldier who is used to horses, mules, and the other animals that live in the American Southwest. Then one day an entire train of these strange animals walks up the road! What are they? Uncle Sam's Camels!



Fort Davis was part of one of the most unusual experiments, in the U.S. Army's history. In 1857, Lieutenant Edward Beale brought 25 camels with him to Fort Davis as he surveyed a wagon road to Arizona. The camels were part of an experiment to use the animals to transport supplies over the deserts of the Southwest. This area is a dry, hot, and otherwise hostile region, not unlike the camel's natural terrain in the Middle East. Camels came through Fort Davis two more times – in 1859 and 1860.

U.S. Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, encouraged Congress to grant money for this experiment, and the army brought 74 camels to Texas. They were used for carrying supplies. Camels were able to carry four times more than mules and to travel longer with less food and water. Unlike oxen, mules, and horses, camels had tough mouths and could eat the thorny plants that thrive in the desert. In fact, once camels saved a lost expedition by finding water 20 miles from the camp and leading the men to it. Many soldiers, however, disliked the camels because they frightened horses or mules and because of their strong smell and sometimes bad temperament.



Picture taken at Living History event. Even now horses are frightened by camels.

When the Civil War broke out, the camel experiment was forgotten. Soon railroads crossed the country and carried more supplies. Camels were sold or turned loose in the desert to fend for themselves. The army never used camels again to transport supplies over the American Desert.

## What Did You Learn?

Name the four animals that carried supplies for the army during the time of Fort Davis.

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Why did Jefferson Davis think camels would be good for carrying supplies in the desert? Do you agree? Why or why not?

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Why were the camels called “Uncle Sam’s Camels”? Who was Uncle Sam?

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Why was the camel experiment ended?

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Compare and contrast the use of trains and the use of camel as a way of transporting supplies for the army. Give your reasons.

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Do you think you would like to ride a camel? Explain.

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Extra Credit: Camels were sometimes called “ships of the desert.” Can you find out why?



Research and compare the two kinds of camels the U.S. Army brought to Texas in the 1850s. Fill in the Venn Diagram to show how they are alike and how they are different. This website will help you find information.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/mammals/camel/camelcoloring.shtml>



Bactrian Camel

Arabian Camel

Common Characteristics



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Student Activity: Camel Journal

### My Journal



Pictures taken at a living history event attended by the Texas Camel Corps, a reenactment group.



Some soldiers at Fort Davis kept journals in which they wrote about the happenings of daily life. Imagine that you were a soldier who saw these amazing animals---camels---arrive. Using what you know and what you have read, write a journal entry about the day the camels came to Fort Davis.

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Soldiers sometimes illustrated their diaries with pictures. Draw a picture of that day on the back of this paper.

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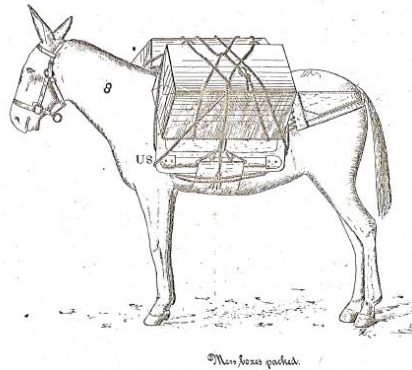
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Student Activity: Fort Davis and Uncle Sam's Camels  
Pack a Camel

### Who Can Carry the Most?



#### Load the Camel

#### Load the Pack Mule

4 Water Barrels @ 85 pounds each		1 water barrel @ 85 pounds	
Bale of Hay @ 250 pounds each		1 sack of oats @ 82 pounds	
Box of Camp Kettles @ 45 pounds		Food box @ 780 pounds	
Food Boxes/Sacks @ 80 pounds			
Tent Canvas @ 86 pounds			
Total		Total	

Add up the supplies each animal can carry. Carry your answer with a calculator. Draw small pictures of the supplies in the blank space next to each animal.

There was one other way the army transported its supplies in the 1850s. It required several mules or horses to pull it. What was it? Draw a picture of it on the back of this paper.